

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL ON NATHANIEL SEAVER KEAY

Written by Louise Kent Keay of Clifton Heights, Pennsylvania

Nathaniel Seaver Keay was born in Springvale, Maine, May 4, 1847 and met with many vicissitudes and changes in his childhood. His parents, Nathaniel Washburn Keay and Susan Woodworth Seaver, were married in Rutland, Vermont on Aug. 3, 1844 by her stepfather, Rev. Cyrus Proctor of the well-known Proctor family of Vermont. They had two sons, Nathaniel Seaver and Cyrus Proctor Keay.

When Nathaniel was seven and Cyrus was five, the death of their mother, April 30, 1853, broke up the home. Nathaniel and Susan were cousins. Susan's mother was Dorcas Keay who married Dr. Nathaniel Seaver, and Nathaniel Washburn Keay was the son of Dorcas' brother, Hawley Appleby Keay (son of Otis Keay and Joanna Appleby). Dr. Nathaniel Seaver, Susan's father, died in 1822 when she and her sister, Hannah Keay Seaver were young. Dorcas married again, the Rev. Proctor and the girls grew up in the Rutland home. Both Susan and Nathaniel Washburn had taught school previous to their marriage, Nathaniel in Maine and Susan in Brandon Vt.

The Keays, variously spelled carelessly, Keay, Key, Keyes (as often is the case in old documents in the colonies) are traced to the oldest families in Briton. They came to Maine at the time of a large exodus from England when Thomas Wentworth, earl of Strafford, was beheaded – Wentworths, Butlers. Cutts, Keays, Waldrons, Carrishes etc, from all of whom you trace your descent. A large grant in Kittery and S. Berwick was made to John Key.

In the Indian wars "Keay Garrison House" was a block house, one mile further up, near Wentworth's and Goodwin's blockhouses, halfway between Berwick and S. Berwick villages (Sullivan History of Maine)

Sarah Orne Jewett, in her authentic historical novel, "The Tory Lover" mentions the "Keay Garrison". Thrilling stories of hardships and danger are recorded where scarcely a family in the settlement escaped the ravages of death and captivity.

In later years the Keays had the mail service coaches in that section of Maine and New Hampshire including Portsmouth and Dover, with which Nathaniel Washburn was connected. An improved coach had been built which the company wished to introduce in other sections.

Nathaniel Washburn's brother, Cyrus, Had a farm at Effingham, N.H. and lived there with his wife, Harriet. I believe they had no children, but Dorcas' husband had died and at the time of Susan's death she was living with her son

Cyrus at Effingham. Here they brought Susan's youngest boy, Cyrus Proctor, age five. He was practically adopted by his uncle and inherited the farm and fine New England manse.

Susan's sister, Hannah Keay Seaver, had married a young lawyer in Vermont, Curtis Harvey, and they were among those who sought the West. They went to Illinois where he helped to write the charter and constitution of Illinois when it became a state.

Nathaniel Seaver, aged seven, went with his father who was traveling for the company. He remembers coming into Pennsylvania, Wilkes-Barre. They wanted someone to introduce the coach into South America and Nathaniel Washburn prepared to go. A business friend in Boston, with mill and home outside in the village of Rockford, agreed to take care of the child, Nathaniel Seaver, for the time. There was a good school. He had just lost a little boy and thought his wife and the two daughters (Naomi and -) would welcome the child. His father intended to be back within the year.

Money arrangements were made for board and every care, but here began a sorrowful period that broke his health and left its mark. The sisters were kind but the mother resented the orphan child when hers had been taken. He slept in an attic room with leaking roof, snow at times falling on his bed, cold meals in the kitchen, milked the cow, did the chores. The years passed letters and money came, but no loving care.

He remembered a Christmas when he poured out silver in his purse to little companions if they would love him. He said he looked at the heavens in wakeful nights, longing and praying to go to his mother and wondering more and more as he grew older. He had a little testament that his Sunday school teacher had given him when he left Springvale. (I have it)

Mr. Boyd, with the not helpful wife, had been drinking heavily. The neighbors were troubled about the child. He was fond of an old lady who remembered seeing the Battle of Bunker Hill. She had him come in to thread needles for her, enough to last, and she liked to tell him stories. There was a baby in another home that he loved. An older boy in the school, Henry Williams, (a lifelong friend) was very kind. On vacations the elder students found work. Henry set up a wagon studio for taking tintypes and traveled with it through the country side.

By this time Seaver, as he was called, found life harder than ever. One night when he was milking, Mr. Boyd, drunk and in an angry mood, berated him for something and kicked him violently off the stool, and then and there caused a lasting injury that troubled him all his life.

The child resolved to find Henry. He succeeded, told him that he had run away and would not go back. Henry and he were away about three weeks and

when they returned, Henry took him to the minister for advice, The minister told him he had relatives and did not need to run away. He said he would take him to his grandmother and uncle in Effingham. He had often dreamed of his brother and was eager to see him.

When they reached the farm he liked his Uncle Cyrus and Aunt Harriet, His grandmother and his mother's sister, Aunt Hannah, had come from Illinois to take her mother, Dorcas back to live with her and they took Seaver with them. Here he had a happy change, mothered and cared for. He loved his cousin, Nellie Curtis, and Elizabeth, the wife of Judge Craig who was one of the largest landowners in the state and judge of the supreme court.

Two of the cousins were his own age. While at Judge Craig's house he had heard the debate between Stephan A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. He told how informal Lincoln was, took off his coat, ran his fingers through his hair, was very forceful and made a lasting impression. With his cousins he was sent East to a boys' "academy" in Poughkeepsie. His cousins entered Annapolis. He had the opportunity but did not care for the sea. He prepared to enter Harvard and arrived at Cambridge but was taken ill. He was rooming with Clarence Ward, a grandson of General Artemas Ward of Revolutionary fame. The illness proved to be typhoid through which he was cared for by the doctor and his friend, Ward. When convalescent but not well enough to go to college his friend persuaded him to go to Bridgewater to complete his recovery.

Many families in the town took the students of the Normal School into their home. This, the first normal school in the country¹ the first Principal Nicholas Tillingham², My mother, Fanny Leonard, graduated in the first class, a four year course, and her sister, Marietta in the second. After graduation mother was made principal of the Model School, the first established. She did not consider it fair to the young children to be experimented on by the young students. The school was discontinued and not revived in a generation.

Young Ward brought his friend to his home and there Mr. and Mrs. Philo Keith welcomed him into their family. Their son, Philo, and daughters, Harriet and Elizabeth were older than he. They were New Church people and there he became a most earnest and understanding believer in these truths, his stay and comfort throughout his life.

¹ The first public Normal Schools (teacher's colleges) were founded under the direction of Horace Mann, Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1839. Bridgewater Normal School, opened in 1840, as the third such school and is the oldest permanently sited and extant school as Bridgewater State College. see <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/dwilson/hist.html>

² Tillinghast

He was advised as he recovered strength, to take the Normal course. Though somewhat to his taste and disappointment, it seemed wise and there he graduated and was made principal of the young ladies academy, a select and fine group of students from the town and East. West and North Bridgewater. Here he taught young women a year or so older than himself. Later he taught a school of troublesome boys in Milton and when he had an opportunity for business he left. The committee regretted and said he had been the only one who had controlled and interested the boys without corporal punishment, quite commonly indulged in certain schools at that time.

Bridgewater had been a loved home for him. With active service for many years in church work and business in Boston where he remained until an opening in Philadelphia (1873 or 74) with Richard Levick Co. Rubber, 12th St below Chestnut, gave him greater prospects. He boarded with a Quaker family, Lippincott, father, mother and daughter. Miss Hannah Lippincott. Mr. Justice Strawbridge and Mr., Isaac Clothier, partners in the beginnings of the present store were warm friends. He went sometimes to their Quaker meeting and mostly to the New Jerusalem Church then at Breed and Brandywine near Spring Garden.

With these many changes and no real home, it is not strange that he kept few belongings. Thus most of the letters that came from his father through the years were destroyed. Of those remaining, I will copy, as some are most interesting and especially the ones that his brother, Cyrus, sent to me by Alan³ when came upon him while at camp Talofa, Lake Ossipee N.H.

One of the wealthiest men in Bridgewater was Joseph Hyde who was in the Cotton Gin Mfg. Co. from the time of the invention by Eli Whitney. He was a graduate of the Latin School in Boston. He moved to Bridgewater where he established the business. He married Harriett Keith. She died early leaving two little girls, Frances Ames and Anne Hyde. Their aunt, Marietta Keith, gave up her school to care for them.

Everyone in town loved her. My mother⁴ and Aunt Mary Leonard were her pupils and always called her Aunt Marrietta. The Leonards and the Keiths lived side by side – adjoining land through several generations on the beautiful shaded main street of the town. There was much talent among the young people – music, drama, literary and “Lyceum” etc. This was a community of highest intellectuality and of more beautiful women than one could often meet in any gathering.

³ Alan Kent Keay

⁴ Fanny Leonard

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Fanny Leonard
Alan Kent Kelly

Frances Hyde was a very fine musician, graduate of the Boston Conservatory. She married Edgar Parker, distinguished artist and portrait painter in Boston. Anne, who had been one of the pupils at the Academy while Nathaniel was principal there, later became engaged to him. The prolonged illness of her father, to whom she was untiringly devoted, brought delay. They were married in June 1877. Nathaniel returned to Philadelphia. But she remained with her father until his death in September when she came to Philadelphia and they visited in our home. She was delicate and went back to Bridgewater in December where on April 28 their daughter, Frances Anne⁵, was born.

Nathaniel again picked up stakes (he was about to be taken into partnership) and went back to Bridgewater and Boston. How he loved children! Devoted to the child he and Aunt Marietta, and to the mother who continued delicate and died June 1879.

Mr. Hyde owned a large plot of land adjoining the normal school property and directly across from his residence, with the thought of building a larger home. He had already built a fine stable and planted and hedged the acreage bordering on three streets. On the center of this Mrs. Parker now built a most attractive and spacious home with every convenience. Mr. Parker was kept busy in his studio in Boston except on weekends.

Nathaniel commuted daily and little Anne was his joy in all the hours he could spend with her. Aunt Marietta again had a motherless child to love and care for and Mrs. Parker made a delightful home for all. She was a very fine musician and greatly depended on in church and town affairs. It seemed to me with her numerous relatives ? was Cousin Frances to most of the families, Keith's, Hydes, Alden's etc. Both Aunt Marietta and she, were devoted to Nathaniel. His business was changing and not permanently satisfying, but had many friends in Boston. He dined at "Young's" daily, a hotel famous for many years. He was always interested in politics and at Mrs. Parker's he entertained many prominent men who came to speak in the town. Gov. John D. Long was a warm friend. As head of the Lyceum bureau, he obtained many lecturers of note - Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. When the next change came he was about to be nominated to represent Bridgewater in the legislature. None could have more intelligently given service to his country.

(Wednesday, Nov. 23, 1887)

⁵ Grandmother of Lyn and Tom Ballard

Transcribed by Alan Seaver Keitt, Hartland Vermont, May, 28th, 2009 from a typewritten copy of uncertain lineage. Minor editing when meaning was clear. Otherwise the text is as written. All footnotes are from the transcriber ASK.

Comment – This is an unsigned manuscript which has been through a copy process. It is clearly written by Louise Kent Keay, second wife of Nathaniel Seaver Keay. I am not sure where I obtained it but probably from my mother, Carol Seaver Keay

The date at the conclusion of this piece was the wedding date of Louise Kent Keay and Nathaniel Seaver Keay. I had thought that it was the date that this biographical note was completed. However there is one reference in the body of the text to Alan Keay meeting Cyrus Proctor Keay at Camp at Lake Ossipee N.H. which could not have occurred until after 1900. Also I have a letter from Louise Natalie Keay Smith to Betty Keay Cresson from 1970 stating that Nathaniel Seaver never revealed the incidents of his unhappy childhood experience in regard to his father until years after his marriage to Louise Kent. So this is very likely a retrospective narrative of uncertain date which carries through to the wedding of NSK and LKK.